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ABSTRACT

The Catholic Church has a responsibility to create an environment in which the practice of the faith makes sense to Hispanics, and enables their religious vitality to express itself within the Church of the United States. Over the next one hundred years the Catholic population of the United States will be predominantly Hispanic. The Church and its educational system must adapt by becoming more responsive to the special needs of Catholic Hispanics. There are few Hispanic clergy in the United States. The Church has embarked on a program to educate the clergy concerning the language and culture of Hispanics, and to teach the clergy to be more effective in dealing with the poor. However, this effort has not touched all of the parishes where Hispanics are members, and many Hispanics remain isolated and unintegrated in their parishes. Catholic schools should thus work to prepare students to exercise their influence in both the Church and community. Young Hispanics are undereducated and underemployed in comparison to the general population. If the Church expects to remedy this problem it must become more sensitive to Hispanic values and more appreciative of their problems. (Author/APM)

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THE CHURCH'S APOSTOLATE TO THE HISPANIC COMMUNITY

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The Church's Apostolate to the Hispanic Community

In April of the year 2081, if present trends continue, the Catholic population of the United States will be predominantly Hispanic. By that time the predominant influence in the Catholic Church should be Hispanic. If Hispanics are going to have the influence which their numbers warrant, not only must their Catholic life be strong; it must be highly educated as well. Yet one of the most serious problems among most Hispanics is their difficulty with our educational systems. Thus the importance of Catholic education in the Hispanic community becomes clear. The preparation of Hispanics for leadership in the Church and the Nation is not only a pastoral responsibility; it is an important educational responsibility as well. That is why it claims attention at a Catholic educational convention. It is in this context that I would like to speak about the Church's apostolate to the Hispanic community.

My theme can be stated simply as follows: The response of the Church to the Hispanic community has, in many ways, been very generous and creative. This is true of the schools as well as the parishes. This should be acknowledged, and the thousands responsible for it should be recognized and honored. The new Coleman[1] and Greeley reports are simply one more piece of the evidence. However, the effectiveness of this effort has not been as great as the effort would lead us to expect. A hasty glance over the Hispanic communities of the United States could easily give the impression that very little is being done, whereas very much is being attempted. What is the inadequacy? It is manifold and I shall try to explain some features of it. The heart of it, as I see it, has been the difficulty of the Church in dealing with the differences of culture and differences of social class. In other words how do you create an environment in which the practice of the faith makes sense to Hispanics, and enables their religious vitality to express itself within the Church of the United States?

This is generally discussed as a pastoral issue of evangelization, religious formation, and pastoral planning. But the educational dimension in both the Catholic and public schools is enormous. It is this dimension to which I would like to direct my attention. The challenge on the educational level is this: how to create a learning environment in which the achievement of intellectual excellence will be more available to Hispanics, and in which their capacity for creative religious response can express itself within the context of American Catholicism.

I would like to look at this from four points of view:

1. The demographic situation: Hispanics are increasing rapidly in the United States, and will continue to increase while the Catholic populations of European background will be decreasing.

2. The response of the Church to the Challenge: The Church has faced the task of preparing a non-Hispanic clergy to minister to Hispanic Catholics who come largely without their own native clergy. The intercultural problem has been difficult both for Hispanics and Americans.

3. The educational preparation of Hispanics: This will be important for the future. In the highly complicated world of the United States, the need for intellectual competence is critical.

4. The challenge of the future: I do not promise any blueprint. But I would like to raise a few issues which are important.

1. The demographic situation:

The 1980 census reports the Hispanics as the most rapidly growing population of the United States. They are officially numbered at 14,600,000, an increase of 60 percent over 1970. If we take only the white population of European background, they increased by only seven percent. Furthermore, the Hispanic population is very young. The median age of the total population of

the United States in 30; half the population above, half below. The median age of the Hispanics is 20. They are ten years younger than the total U.S. population. Thus when they reach marriageable age, even if they have small families, the increase will be compounded. Add to this the fact that no one knows how many undocumented aliens among them have not been counted. This Hispanic migration is going to continue. It will not slow down. The United States admits 270,000 immigrants a year with permanent visas. The President's Special Commission on Immigration and Refugees recommended an increase to 350,000 per year.[2] There are the special preference people who come in without numbers, the parents or children of U.S. citizens for example. Last year these numbered 110,000. This will continue and, most likely, will increase. The largest number of all these permanent visas are being taken by Hispanics, about 40 percent. Keep in mind that the populations of Central and South America are the most rapidly growing populations of the world; and poverty is widespread. The pressure to come north, especially when relatives and friends have preceded you, will be strong. And I am afraid that, like the poor, the undocumented will always be with us.

I do not wish to burden you with numbers. But the future is people, and an increasing number of these people will be Hispanic. This is not speculation. I am talking about a population that is already here. Let us take a local illustration. In 1979, of the entire student body in the public schools of New York City, 30 percent were Hispanic, 287,000 children. It is higher than that today. These are children sitting in the classrooms. If we take just the Catholic elementary schools of Manhattan and the Bronx, 40 percent of these students, 20,000, are Hispanic. Only 32 percent are non-Hispanic whites. The world of the future is already here; and it will keep coming; and, for us, it is predominantly Hispanic.

Difference among Hispanics: Life is never simple. These Hispanics,

within themselves, are very different kinds of people. It is not a homogeneous population.[3] The Southwest was originally part of Mexico, and the relationship of the Church to people of Mexican background cannot be understood without an understanding of the consequences of the Mexican-American War. A solidly established Mexican Catholicism flourished in the Southwest long before the founding of the United States. The invasion and domination by the Anglos upset not only their social and political life; it upset their religious life as well. A reading of the life of Bishop Lamy[4] of Santa Fe reveals the problems for Mexicans and Americans in the shift from a Mexican dominated Church to one dominated by Catholics of European background.

Puerto Ricans are very different from Mexicans.[5] Mexicans, racially, are predominantly mestizo, the offspring of unions of Indians and Europeans. Puerto Ricans represent a mingling of Spanish, a small number of Taino Indians, and African Blacks. They range in color from completely Negroid to completely Caucasoid. The same for Dominicans. The Mexicans derived from one of the most remarkable civilizations of the world, deeply rooted in the religion of the Aztecs and the Mayans. The pre-Christian religious experience was very different from that of the Puerto Ricans. Puerto Ricans have been deeply affected by African influences, and later, by spiritism from the United tates. Puerto Rican Catholicism cannot be understood without understanding the years of Spanish domination, followed by the domination of the United States. In four hundred years of Spanish domination, there was only one Puerto Rican Bishop, Bishop Arizmendi, (1803-1814). It took more than sixty years of American domination before a Puerto Rican was consecrated Bishop in 1961. Puerto Ricans are citizens of the United States. They come and go as they please. Mexicans have problems; they need documents. The Cubans of the 1960's had the status of refugees; they were middle and upper class, and many were well educated. They also brought priests as refugees with them. In twenty years they have converted Miami into a dynamic center of international

trade and commerce. The more recent Cuban refugees have not been as fortunate. Since 1960 the Dominicans have come by the hundreds of thousands, and the Central and South Americans, largely without priests, many without documents. Variety may be the spice of life, but the differences among Hispanics complicate the apostolic problems enormously. Three things they all have in common: the Spanish language; the background of Spanish colonial experience; and Spanish colonial Catholicism. To this the Church of the United States had to respond.

2. The Response of the Church:

An attempt to describe the response of the Church would be a staggering task. If I tried to detail a list of policies and programs, it would begin to sound like a telephone book. Let me do two things: describe in more detail the challenge to which the Church had to respond; then, using the New York Archdiocese as an example, indicate some ways the Church responded.

Note what the Church faced: a rapid influx of hundreds of thousands of Hispanics, Puerto Ricans and later Dominicans, Central and South Americans in the Northeast; Mexicans in the southwest who were coming, largely without their own clergy. As I indicated the southwest was somewhat different from the northeast; but there are many similarities of persons of Mexican background moving into areas where they had to depend on American clergy. The newcomers spoke a different language; they came from a different cultural background; and in most cases they were very poor. Language, culture and social class, these were the three conditions which complicated the apostolate to the Hispanics.

Traditionally the Church had responded to immigrants by the creation of national or language parishes, staffed by priests of the same native background as the immigrants. These were the German parishes, the Italian, Polish, Slovak parishes, etc., with which we are all familiar. However, the Hispanics coming in the 1950's and after were coming at the time when the national parishes were becoming a heavy burden on the Bishops. Most of the third generation had moved out and, in the neighborhood of the German or Polish or Slovak parish, there were

few or no German or Polish people. They had been replaced by Blacks and Puerto Ricans. The Bishops were reluctant to establish new parishes for the Puerto Ricans. What is more they did not have their Puerto Rican priests to demand them as the earlier immigrant clergy had done for their own people. In some places they were started; but this was not the common experience.

What is known as the integrated parish became the more common experience. Puerto Ricans became parishioners of existing parishes; American priests learned Spanish and sought to minister to them. Priests of middle class American background faced the task of dealing with the very poor. In some parishes, Spanish priests were invited from Spain. But the great task fell on the shoulders of the American clergy. The response, as I have indicated, was generous and creative in many places. If we take New York, for the first time in its history, a large, complicated and established diocese faced the task of adapting an apostolate to massive numbers of Catholics who came without their priests, and from a different language and cultural background. By 1970, there were 700,000 Hispanics in Manhattan and the Bronx alone. Only eight dioceses of the United States had a larger number of Catholics than that. Here you had a population equal to the ninth largest diocese in the Nation, superimposed on an already large and complicated Archdiocese of New York.

A series of crash programs were started in the early 1950's to train large numbers of priests in the shortest possible time. The office of Spanish Catholic Action was established in 1953 to develop and coordinate the apostolate to the Hispanics, then almost all Puerto Ricans; In 1955, in Puerto Rico, we held the first Conference on the Spiritual Care of Puerto Rican Migrants. (The Report on this Conference is now recognized as an historic document; it has just been reprinted by Arno Press.)[6] In 1957 Monsignor Illich founded the Institute of Intercultural Communication in Ponce, Puerto Rico. During the following fifteen years it educated hundreds of American priests, religious and lay people in

the Spanish language, the cultural background of the Puerto Rican people; and the experience of migration and adjustment to life on the continent. Many of the people trained in this program have done remarkable work. They have really been the backbone of the Hispanic apostolate in the Archdiocese and elsewhere. Never before in the history of American Catholicism (perhaps in the history of the Church anywhere) had the Church made so great an effort to serve Catholic newcomers of a different language and cultural background. With some modifications, a similar program was developing in the southwest. I'll mention that later.

Three clear principles guided this apostolate: Language: ministry to the newcomers had to be in their language. They could not be expected to learn English overnight. Language permeates religious sentiment and feeling; without it people feel lost, even if they have acquired a working knowledge of the language of the continent. As Joshua Fishman, the great authority on language maintenance observed: the native tongue comes strongly back when people talk about their family, their love life, or about God. Secondly, Culture: every effort had to be made to provide for the continuity of culture. Culture is the intimate fabric of a person's life. It is the sum total of the way a person thinks, believes, reacts, expresses inmost thoughts, ideas, attitudes and feelings. It is what makes me what I am. Therefore, the principle became recognized that an effective ministry must be provided in a cultural style in which the newcomer is at home, in a style which is familiar and which makes sense. The concept of culture was introduced firmly into the Church's life and teaching. It was not an easy task, let me assure you. But, thank the Lord, we did it. Finally, social class: if the newcomers were poor, as most of them were, the priest found himself called to be the advocate to make sure the poor received from public and private agencies the services they needed. Adaptation to language, culture and social class, these were the characteristics of the Hispanic ministry.

Generous as this response was, it left many of the problems unsolved. The generous effort of the Church did not touch all the clergy. In many a parish the response to Hispanics was indifferent or hostile. In many parishes where the response of the clergy was generous, the response of many of the parishes was not. In 1976 we did a survey of Hispanic leaders in the 40 northeast dioceses of the United States.[7] We asked the Hispanics about their relationship between the older parishioners and the Hispanic newcomers. Out of 129 responses, only one person described the relationship as "good." Thirty nine said it was one of prejudice and discrimination; 41 said the older parishioners did not like the newcomers but did not show it; 43 said the older parishioners were making an effort to be friendly. It is important not to let this response obscure the fact that some remarkable work was going on. But it does reveal the widespread experience of Hispanics. They do not feel that they are completely part of the Church or that the Church is completely theirs. The integrated parish simply is not theirs. It may become theirs by default as a neighborhood become completely Hispanic. But in general they have the feeling of outsiders. As one respondent emphasized: "We want to be accepted for what we are, race, color, culture and customs." In view of the enormous effort to prepare the American clergy to receive the Hispanics, this kind of reaction of Hispanics may seem puzzling, even ungrateful. But it does reveal the difficulty of creating a situation in which Hispanics feel themselves an integral part of the American Church.

The scene has been changing, fortunately, due, in many cases, to the effort of the Hispanics themselves. Before the "Call to Action" Assembly in Detroit in 1976, the Hispanics in the United States had already had two national assemblies of their own, (encuentros as they call them). They had worked out their recommendations and submitted them to the Bishops. And, at the Call to Action, they were the best organized caucus at the Assembly. Hispanic priests have formed a national organization called Padres; and the Sisters have their national organization, Las Hermanas. In 1971 the Mexican American Cultural Center

was established in San Antonio, Texas, as a center for dialogue, training for Hispanics and non-Hispanics in the skills of intercultural understanding and communication, and a publication center. The effort was coming from the Hispanic population. But the thrust is not separatist. The Hispanics do not want to be a people apart. They want to be a vital part of the American Church, but they want to be a part as Hispanics. The Center, therefore, seeks the development of an authentic pluralism in the American Church. The Northeast Pastoral Center for Hispanics was established in 1975, and seeks to coordinate the development of the apostolate to the Spanish-speaking in the northeast. There is an increasing vitality to these activities of Hispanic Catholics which holds great promise for the future.

The small number of Hispanic clergy continues to be a problem, as it is with clergy everywhere. There is an increase but it is slow. A survey of the Northeast Pastoral Center finds 1491 Hispanic priests in the United States in 1980, an increase of 74 over the number in 1979. There were 818 Hispanic seminarians in 1980 in contrast to 804 in 1979. The survey estimated 400 Hispanic Deacons in 1979. Numbers are not the only significant factor. There is a vitality to the Church in many parts of Latin America much more impressive than anything that we find in the United States. It is no mystery that ten priests and the Archbishop in El Salvador have been killed because they were dedicated to the cause of justice for their people. It is my conviction that the increase in Hispanic immigrants will bring to the American Church some of the vitality which is evident in so many areas from which they come. There is the remarkable involvement of the laity in the Church's life through the Basic Christian Communities; and an equally remarkable involvement of the Church in the lives of the poor in their struggle for justice and liberation from oppression. If Hispanics can bring this influence to bear on the American Church, their contribution will be enormous and healthy.[8]

The Schools: It is in this context that I would like to say something about the schools. If the Hispanics do not become intellectually prepared, it will be difficult for them to exercise the influence in the Church and Nation which their numbers warrant. We have reason to be enthusiastic about the Coleman and Greeley reports on the effectiveness of Catholic schools with minority students. But we must not permit our enthusiasm to obscure the challenge that still remains. For one thing, the vast majority of Hispanic students are not in Catholic schools. If we just take Manhattan and the Bronx, there are 75,000 Hispanics in the public elementary schools; there are 20,000 Hispanics in the Catholic elementary schools of the same two boroughs. And I think I am correct in saying that New York is one of the most involved dioceses with Hispanics. There were 287,000 Hispanic children in the entire Public School system of New York City in 1979. Father Bredeweg's[9] survey reports that there are 256,000 Hispanic children in the Catholic schools of the Nation. Note this: there were more Hispanic children in the New York public schools alone in 1979, than there are Hispanics in the entire Catholic school system of the United States. Our concern for the education of Hispanics will have to involve an increasing concern for the quality of education in the public schools. We must neither disregard nor disdain them. That is where the vast majority of our Hispanic children are. The drop out rate in the New York Public High Schools is about 46% according to the Chancellor. It is higher than that for Hispanics. The result is a high rate of unemployment for young Hispanics, particularly Puerto Ricans.[10] In 1977, for example, only 21% of Puerto Rican youths in their teens were employed; it was 38% for Cubans; it was 46% for all teenagers in the Nation. The relationship of education to occupation, particularly in a city like New York is obvious. New York is a white collar employment area. Without high school training at least, a young person is handicapped. The higher education picture is also not very favorable. Of all Hispanics between the ages of 18-24 years in 1978, only 12.3% were undergraduates or graduate students;

it was over 30% for the total population of the United States. In Texas where 20% of the population is Hispanic, only 7% of the undergraduates in the University of Texas were Hispanic; 2.5% of the faculty were Hispanic![11] I must add one important qualification here. If you segregate the second generation from the first, the second generation is reaching an educational level close to the national average.

These data need many qualifications, and the reasons for the educational problems of Hispanics are numerous and complicated, from characteristics of their cultural background for some; to their difficulty in managing the complications of our educational bureaucracies; to the poverty which presses them into early employment; to high levels of prejudice and discrimination in many areas.

4. The Challenge of the Future.

In view of this, three things I stress: if we are going to educate the ones who will constitute the majority of the Catholic population a century from now, we must collaborate with Hispanics to enable them to achieve a higher level of education than they now enjoy; secondly, we cannot expect them to do this by themselves. Pluralism is a two way street. And, as I have indicated, one important feature of their experience is that they must be accepted. If we are going to do this, we must create a situation in which Hispanics feel at home in the schools and the churches, somewhat the same way the Irish felt at home in their Irish parishes, and the Germans and Polish, etc., felt at home in their national parishes and schools. This is the challenge of intercultural understanding and communication, the need on our part for a deep respect for the values and qualities which make Hispanics Hispanics; and a need on their part for an understanding and respect for the things that make us American. They must have the genuine assurance that they really belong; that the Catholic world to which they are coming is their world in much the same way as it is our world. This means particularly on our part the ability to see the world as they see it; to be sensitive to the values which they cherish; to appreciate the problems which our way of life creates for them

as they seek to find their way in it.

This will not double their SATs overnight; nor will it noticeably increase their enrollment in colleges by September. But it is a beginning; the basis on which to build; the creation of an environment in which they have the self assurance of knowing who they are; and the even greater assurance that we know who they are and respect it. It is the creation of a learning environment in which they can be themselves while they seek to relate their life to American life and culture. One integrates from a position of strength; never from a position of weakness.

If the influx of Hispanics is to bring new vitality to the Church, they must be able to be themselves, and have an environment in which they can express their values and ideals which constitute their life and culture. That environment is created in a relationship with us, in which they know we perceive the values which they treasure, and accept them. Thank God for the record that is reflected in the Coleman and Greeley reports. But all these studies tell us is that Hispanics in Catholic schools are doing well according to the standard norms by which we judge educational achievement. They tell us nothing about the extent to which these Hispanic students retain their sense of identity and pride in their cultural background, or the extent to which they will be capable of bringing in a creative way the influence that Hispanic culture should bring to the American Church. That is the heart of the matter; that is the task that remains to be done. If it is not done, we will have missed the challenge and lost the future.

This does not mean Hispanics are not going to change. They are changing in their own lands, and they will change here. There is a process of adjustment that is inescapable. But that adjustment must not be in the form of an American way of life imposed on them. It must be their creative response of achieving an adjustment in which they have the confidence of being themselves as they develop the confidence of being American, in their way, not necessarily ours. What of

all the problems! They will still be there. But, if we achieve a genuine inter-cultural relationship, we will have created an environment in which Hispanics as well as ourselves can move toward the solutions of our problems and theirs in a way in which the Hispanic culture will enrich and enliven the American Church instead of being blighted and broken by it. "In my Father's House, there are many mansions," said the Lord. And the Prophet foretold the Bride of Christ as "The Queen surrounded by variety." Peter got the message clear when he faced the first challenge of what to do with Romans who wanted to become Christians. God is not a respecter of any particular race or nation. He receives them all if they seek Him and do what piety demands.[12]

Footnotes

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8. Puebla and Beyond: Documentation and Commentary, Ed. by John Eagleson and Philip Scharper, translated by John Drury, New York: Orbis Books, 1979.

9. Frank Bredeweg. "A Statistical Report on U.S. Catholic Schools, 1980-81" National Catholic Educational Association, 1 Dupont Circle, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20036.

10. Morris J. Newman, A Profile of Hispanics in the U.S. Work Force. Monthly Labor Review, Dec. 1978. pp. 3-14.

11. Lorenzo Middleton, "Hispanics on the Campuses: A Long Way to Go," Chronicle of Higher Education, June 2, 1980. For an analysis of the second generation Puerto Ricans as distinct from the first, see J.P. Fitzpatrick, "The Puerto Ricans," in The Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups. (1980).

12. Acts of the Apostles, Ch. 10.